

Disfellowshipping in the Early Congregations

How was disfellowshipping handled in the first century?

Discretion was very important to those in the time of Jesus. (see my article: First will be Last and the Last First) Everyone was concerned about their status in the community. One's reputation was of utmost importance. This would have motivated them to act in an honorable way. Why?

If someone did something dishonorable, the more people that knew of their error the bigger the hit was to their reputation and status. That's why Jesus' new way of dealing with sinners worked so well.

(Matthew 18:15-17) “Moreover, if your brother commits a sin, go and reveal his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take along with you one or two more, so that on the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be established. ¹⁷ If he does not listen to them, speak to the congregation. If he does not listen even to the congregation, let him be to you just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector.

Each step in the process would affect one's reputation even more:

Step 1) One person - discreet

Step 2) Two or three people - less discreet

Step 3) The whole congregation - complete loss of discretion

This would make the one who erred want to repent before everyone was made aware of their wrongdoing. Let's consider each step more closely:

Between you and him alone

(Matthew 18:15) “Moreover, if your brother commits a sin, go and reveal his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

This would have been a very discreet conversation. The one who erred would have been able to make amends and keep their reputation intact.

Would just anyone have confronted someone about a sin? Probably not. Due to societal norms at the time, a woman would probably not have presumed to rebuke a man. And a child or new one might not have been spiritually qualified to do so either.

(Galatians 6:1) Brothers, even if a man takes a false step before he is aware of it, you who have spiritual qualifications try to readjust such a man in a spirit of mildness. But keep an eye on yourself, for fear you too may be tempted.

What about the sin? Were these instructions only for very minor sins? Note what James says:

(James 5:19, 20) My brothers, if anyone among you is led astray from the truth and another turns him back, ²⁰ know that whoever turns a sinner back from the error of his way will save him from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

James was talking about the one-on-one conversation spoken of at Matthew 18:15 and referred to "a *multitude of sins*," even those that were worthy of "death," so not just minor sins. And Matthew 18:15 says "a sin", not 'a minor sin'. There is only one sin that is unforgivable, and that is blaspheming against the holy spirit. (Mt 12:31) Remember, it was Jesus who set up that new method for dealing with sinners.

(Matthew 18:20) For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst."

When a sinner listened to the one who came to them, they were "*washed clean*" if they repented. (1Jo 1:9)

(1 Corinthians 6:9-11) Or do you not know that unrighteous people will not inherit God's Kingdom? Do not be misled. Those who are sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, men who submit to homosexual acts, men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ thieves, greedy people, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners will not inherit God's Kingdom. ¹¹ And yet that is what some of you were. But you have been washed clean; you have been sanctified; you have been declared righteous in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and with the spirit of our God.

Could one have forgiven a repentant adulterous mate? Yes. But although Jehovah does hate a divorcing (Mal 2:16), if the adultery did not stop then the 'forgive 77 times' rule (Mt 18:22) did not apply. Why? Paul explains it:

(1 Corinthians 6:15-20) Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I, then, take the members of the Christ away and join them to a prostitute? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that anyone who is joined to a prostitute is one body with her? For "the two," says he, "will be one flesh." ¹⁷ But whoever is joined to the Lord is one with him in spirit. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality! Every other sin that a man may commit is outside his body, but whoever practices sexual immorality is sinning against his own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is the temple of the holy spirit within you, which you have from God? Also, you do not belong to yourselves, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. By all means, glorify God in your body.

So even if the innocent mate wished to forgive a repeating offender, they would have needed to separate themselves from them so as not to have been guilty themselves through marriage.

One or two more

(Matthew 18:16) But if he does not listen, take along with you one or two more, so that on the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be established.

This was slightly less discreet. The sinner would now have two or three knowing about his indiscretion. This escalation would hopefully have made the one who erred realize the severity of their actions and be moved to repentance.

To the congregation

(Matthew 18:17) If he does not listen to them, speak to the congregation. If he does not listen even to the congregation, let him be to you just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector.

Did the term "*congregation*" refer only to the elders? No. There are two slightly different Greek words used in Matthew 18:17 (***ek·kle·si'a*** and ***ek·kle·si'as***) that are translated as "congregation." Those same Greek words were used in many other scriptures. They always referred to the whole congregation and never just the elders of the congregation. (Every scriptural use of those two Greek words are quoted at the end of this article.) When the congregation leaders were being referred to in the Bible terms such as elder, older man, and overseer were used, and were referred to separately from the term "congregation." (Ac 15:22; 20:17; 1Ti 3:2, 5; Jas 5:14; 3Jo 1, 6)

The early Christian congregations did not have appointed judges, like in "*ancient times*." (Mt 5:21; Ex 18:22) If there were judges in the first century then the scripture would say that step 3 was to bring the issue before the judges, or similar wording. No, but when problems reached step 3 they were brought before the whole congregation, as the following verses show.

These scriptures were written "*to the congregation of God that is in Corinth*," not just to the elders of that congregation. (2Co 1:1)

(2 Corinthians 2:5-11) Now if anyone has caused sadness, he has saddened, not me, but all of you to an extent—not to be too harsh in what I say. ⁶ This rebuke given by the majority is sufficient for such a man; ⁷ now you should instead kindly forgive and comfort him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sadness. ⁸ I therefore exhort you to confirm your love for him. ⁹ For this is also why I wrote to you: to determine whether you would give proof of your obedience in all things. ¹⁰ If you forgive anyone for anything, I do also. In fact, whatever I have forgiven (if I have forgiven anything) has been for your sake in Christ's sight, ¹¹ so that we may not be overreached by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs.

These scriptures were also directed at the whole congregation:

(1 Corinthians 5:11-13) But now I am writing you to stop keeping company with anyone called a brother who is sexually immoral or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man. ¹² For what do I have to do with judging those outside? Do you not judge those inside, ¹³ while God judges those outside? "Remove the wicked person from among yourselves."

If the judging was only done by the elders in the first century, then "*stop keeping company*" would have also only been for the elders. No, but it was the congregation who judged, and who stopped keeping company with the unrepentant wicked. The entire congregation may not have participated in

the final judging because a child or a very new one may not have been in the position to reprimand someone. (Ga 6:1) But it was not just a select few who were capable.

(James 5:19, 20) My brothers, if anyone among you is led astray from the truth and another turns him back, ²⁰ know that whoever turns a sinner back from the error of his way will save him from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Were there any specific duties given just to the elders? Yes.

(1 Peter 5:1-3) Therefore, as a fellow elder, a witness of the sufferings of the Christ and a sharer of the glory that is to be revealed, I make this appeal to the elders among you: ² Shepherd the flock of God under your care, serving as overseers, not under compulsion, but willingly before God; not for love of dishonest gain, but eagerly; ³ not lording it over those who are God's inheritance, but becoming examples to the flock.

How did the elders "*shepherd the flock*"? By "*serving as overseers*" and by "*becoming examples to the flock*." Being an example was not reproving, but what about "*serving as overseers*"?

(Titus 1:7-13) For as God's steward, an overseer must be free from accusation, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not a drunkard, not violent, not greedy of dishonest gain, ⁸ but hospitable, a lover of goodness, sound in mind, righteous, loyal, self-controlled, ⁹ holding firmly to the faithful word as respects his art of teaching, so that he may be able both to encourage by the teaching that is wholesome and to reprove those who contradict. ¹⁰ For there are many rebellious men, profitless talkers, and deceivers, especially those who adhere to the circumcision. ¹¹ It is necessary to shut their mouths, because these very men keep on subverting entire households by teaching things they should not for the sake of dishonest gain. ¹² A certain one of them, their own prophet, said: "Cre'tans are always liars, injurious wild beasts, idle gluttons." ¹³ This witness is true. For this very reason, keep on reprovng them with severity so that they may be healthy in the faith,

Those scriptures were written for overseers and include directions to reprove, but they do not say that reproving was something exclusive to the overseers, just as teaching and being hospitable was not exclusive to the overseers.

(2 Corinthians 1:24) Not that we are the masters over your faith, but we are fellow workers for your joy, for it is by your faith that you are standing.

Elders were also to shepherd the flock. A literal shepherd would lead the sheep out to green pastures so that they were well fed, and would keep an eye out for any dangers that may threaten the flock.

(Acts 20:28) Pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the holy spirit has appointed you overseers, to shepherd the congregation of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own Son.

(John 21:15-17) When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter: "Simon son of

John, do you love me more than these?" He replied to him: "Yes, Lord, you know I have affection for you." He said to him: "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again he said to him a second time: "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He replied: "Yes, Lord, you know I have affection for you." He said to him: "Shepherd my little sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him a third time: "Simon son of John, do you have affection for me?" Peter became grieved that he asked him the third time: "Do you have affection for me?" So he said to him: "Lord, you are aware of all things; you know that I have affection for you." Jesus said to him: "Feed my little sheep."

So the elders fed the lambs and little sheep spiritual food, kept an eye out for dangers to the congregation, set the example on how to act, and took the lead in encouraging one another.

What about 2 Timothy 4:2? There Paul instructs Timothy, an elder, to "*reprove and reprimand.*"

(2 Timothy 4:2) Preach the word; be at it urgently in favorable times and difficult times; reprove, reprimand, exhort, with all patience and art of teaching.

Those instructions to reprove and reprimand were given to Timothy, an anointed elder, but were they only for Timothy, or only for the anointed or elders? Not according to what Paul said earlier in his letter. At 2 Timothy 2:24, 25 Paul says that anyone who is "*a slave of the Lord*" needs to be "*instructing with mildness those not favorably disposed; as perhaps God may give them repentance.*"

There was another duty that was only for elders, but before we cover that let's cover what would have lead up to it. If someone had committed a sin they could confess their sin to Jehovah for forgiveness. (Lu 11:4)

(Acts 3:19) "Repent, therefore, and turn around so as to get your sins blotted out, so that seasons of refreshing may come from Jehovah himself

(1 John 1:9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous so as to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(1 John 2:1) My little children, I am writing you these things so that you may not commit a sin. And yet, if anyone does commit a sin, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one.

But if they could not stop sinning, then they were spiritually sick. That is where the elders came in to the picture. The spiritually sick one could have gone to the elders for help. Opening up to them, and with their help and their prayers, the sick one would hopefully have been able to kick the sinful habit. This solution offered a sinner a way to get the help they wanted and needed without the whole congregation finding out about it and their reputation being ruined. Which would have been a barrier for them to come forward if such a discreet option had not been available.

(James 5:14-16) Is there anyone sick among you? Let him call the elders of the congregation to him, and let them pray over him, applying oil to him in the name of Jehovah. ¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will make the sick one well, and Jehovah will raise him up. Also, if he has committed sins, he

will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, openly confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. A righteous man's supplication has a powerful effect.

The following scriptures are about disputes of the kind that were settled in court ("*matters of life to be tried*"), including legal issues like fraud. This is not talking about such sins as immorality.

(1 Corinthians 6:1-8) Does any one of you who has a dispute with another dare to go to court before unrighteous men, and not before the holy ones? ² Or do you not know that the holy ones will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you not competent to try very trivial matters? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? Then why not matters of this life? ⁴ If, then, you do have matters of this life to be tried, is it the men looked down on in the congregation whom you assign as judges? ⁵ I am speaking to move you to shame. Is there not one wise man among you who is able to judge between his brothers? ⁶ Instead, brother goes to court against brother, and before unbelievers at that! ⁷ Really, it is already a defeat for you when you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather let yourselves be wronged? Why do you not rather let yourselves be defrauded? ⁸ Instead, you wrong and defraud, and your brothers at that!

What about Matthew 5:22? Does that not talk about assigned judges?

(Matthew 5:22) However, I say to you that everyone who continues wrathful with his brother will be accountable to the court of justice; and whoever addresses his brother with an unspeakable word of contempt will be accountable to the Supreme Court; whereas whoever says, 'You despicable fool!' will be liable to the fiery Ge·hen'na.

That verse starts with the word "*however*" because Jesus was comparing it to the previous verse, which says:

(Matthew 5:21) "You heard that it was said to those of ancient times: 'You must not murder, but whoever commits a murder will be accountable to the court of justice.'

Jesus was comparing wrath with one's brother, to murder, which was such a serious crime that it would have been ruled over in the land's local court of justice. And he compared addressing one's brother with an unspeakable word to an even worse crime that needed to be taken to the land's Supreme Court. Jesus was not referring to some court system set up in the then current Christian congregations. There were no such Christian courts.

The scriptures do not say exactly how it happened when someone was brought before the congregation, but here are scriptures that show that it did happen.

(1 Timothy 5:20) Reprove before all onlookers those who practice sin, as a warning to the rest.

It would not have been a warning to "*all onlookers*" if they were not all looking on and watching the proceedings take place. They would not have known what the sinner had done and the circumstances surrounding it so as to avoid it themselves in the future. No, they did not just hear the judgment.

(Galatians 2:11) However, when Ce'phas came to Antioch, I resisted him face-to-face, because he was clearly in the wrong.

Paul approached Cephas "*face-to-face*", (Mt 18:15) but seeing that it did not work, and since it was already a public matter, Paul moved immediately to step three and confronted him in front of the whole congregation.

(Galatians 2:14) But when I saw that they were not walking in step with the truth of the good news, I said to Ce'phas before them all:

Yes, he confronted Ce'phas "*before them all*."

The following verse was directed at the congregation of Corinth, so it would seem that the decision to rebuke the sinner was made by a simple majority of the congregation.

(2 Corinthians 2:6) This rebuke given by the majority is sufficient for such a man

Even when a new-comer joins the congregation, he is examined by the whole congregation.

(1 Corinthians 14:24, 25) But if you are all prophesying and an unbeliever or an ordinary person comes in, he will be reprov'd and closely examined by them all.²⁵ The secrets of his heart then become evident, so that he will fall facedown and worship God, declaring: "God is really among you."

When an important decision needed to be made, the twelve apostles did not make the decision themselves, nor did they bring it before the elders of the congregations, but they brought the issue before the whole "*multitude of the disciples*". And the twelve did not have the selected men go through some interview process to make sure they were acceptable to the twelve, but they accepted the men who the multitude chose by praying over them and laying their hands on them.

(Acts 6:1-6) Now in those days when the disciples were increasing, the Greek-speaking Jews began complaining against the Hebrew-speaking Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution.² So the Twelve called the multitude of the disciples together and said: "It is not right for us to leave the word of God to distribute food to tables."³ So, brothers, select for yourselves seven reputable men from among you, full of spirit and wisdom, that we may appoint them over this necessary matter;⁴ but we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."⁵ What they said was pleasing to the whole multitude, and they selected Stephen, a man full of faith and holy spirit, as well as Philip, Proch'o-rus, Ni-ca'nor, Ti'mon, Par'me-nas, and Nic'o-la'us, a proselyte of Antioch.⁶ They brought them to the apostles, and after praying, they laid their hands on them.

Next we see that one sin is more severe than others.

(Matthew 18:21, 22) Then Peter came and said to him: "Lord, how many times is my brother to sin against me and am I to forgive him? Up to seven times?"²² Jesus said to him: "I say to you,

not up to seven times, but up to 77 times.

(Luke 17:3, 4) Pay attention to yourselves. If your brother commits a sin, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. ⁴ Even if he sins seven times a day against you and he comes back to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

Now compare that to Titus 3:10 and 11.

(Titus 3:10, 11) As for a man who promotes a sect, reject him after a first and a second admonition, ¹¹ knowing that such a man has deviated from the way and is sinning and is self-condemned.

Why are those scriptures different? The first ones say to forgive 77 times or 7 times a day, the other says to reject him after only 2 admonishments. The difference is that in Titus the sinner had committed the very serious sin of promoting a sect, and continued to do so. That was acting against the true teachings of Christ and verged on sinning against the holy spirit.

Disfellowshipped

If the sinner was not repentant they were no longer to be consorted with and they were removed from the congregation.

(Matthew 18:17) If he does not listen to them, speak to the congregation. If he does not listen even to the congregation, let him be to you just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector.

(Romans 16:17) Now I urge you, brothers, to keep your eye on those who create divisions and causes for stumbling contrary to the teaching that you have learned, and avoid them.

(1 Corinthians 5:11-13) But now I am writing you to stop keeping company with anyone called a brother who is sexually immoral or a greedy person or an idolater or a reviler or a drunkard or an extortioner, not even eating with such a man. ¹² For what do I have to do with judging those outside? Do you not judge those inside, ¹³ while God judges those outside? **Remove the wicked person from among yourselves.**"

Yes, the congregation was to remove the unrepentant wicked person from among themselves. This is not instructions to the elders to remove the person from their ranks.

Expulsion from the congregation made sense since why would an unrepentant one wish to continue to attend the congregation meetings except for nefarious reasons? (2 John 10)

Why this new arrangement was so effective

(Matthew 18:15-17) "Moreover, if your brother commits a sin, go and reveal his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take along with you one or two more, so that on the testimony of two or three witnesses every matter may be established. ¹⁷ If he does not listen to them, speak to the congregation. If he does not

listen even to the congregation, let him be to you just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector.

Let's break down how it worked. There were 3 steps:

Step 1) "between you and him alone"

Step 2) "take along with you one or two more"

Step 3) "speak to the congregation"

And there are four basic types of people regarding this arrangement:

Type A) one who is a sinner and when confronted feels regret and repents

Type B) one who has sinned but doesn't think they did anything wrong

Type C) one who is a sinner and wishes to conceal and deny it

Type D) one who is innocent but is being falsely accused (either intentionally or unintentionally)

Step 1

Type A reacted well to this first step and were humble enough to admit their error and repent.

Type B could have responded well if upon hearing the counsel they realized that they did in fact sin. But if they thought that the accuser was wrong or had bad intentions then they would not have been moved to repentance.

Types C and D would not have responded to step 1 with repentance.

Step 2

Type B may have responded to this step once confronted with two or three others who's collective advice and counsel swayed their understanding of the situation. But not if they thought that the accuser just brought his biased or corrupt friends along to back him up even though they knew the accused was innocent.

Type C would probably not have respond well to this step either.

Type D, being innocent, would of course have not responded to this step with repentance for a sin that they did not commit.

Step 3

Type B, when brought before the entire congregation and saw that the congregation sided with the accuser (if they had a good heart), would finally have realized that they really were in the wrong. And that they had also been wrong about the intentions of their accusers. Then they would no doubt have repented and asked forgiveness.

Type C could have continued to deny their guilt, even before the entire congregation, and therefore be removed from the congregation due to their lack of humility and repentance. (1Co 5:4-6, 11-13) Or if they had humbly excepted the rebuke by the congregation they would have been forgiven. (Lu 17:4; 2Co 2:6, 7)

For type D this arrangement was very beneficial. At steps 1 and 2 they would of course have denied any error since they were in fact innocent. At step 3 the congregation would have been able to help absolve them of the false or biased accusations. If it stopped at step 2 and it were just up to two or three others to privately judge them, and if those judges were in error, or biased, or corrupt, or relying on false accusations to make their judgment, then the one being accused would have been in very serious trouble with no way out. But since step 3 brought their case before the entire congregation any error would most likely have gotten resolved since it was very unlikely that the majority of the congregation would have sided with biased or corrupt individuals making false accusations, so they would have received a just outcome.

Implementation

Other than the decision being made by a majority (2 Corinthians 2:6), and not accepting "*an accusation against an older man except on the evidence of two or three witnesses,*" (1Ti 5:19) we don't know much about how step 3 was implemented. Were all in the congregation allowed to voice their opinion? (1Co 14:24) Was it only men over 30 who participated in the final vote? (1 Chronicles 23:3) Or was it anyone over 20? (Numbers 14:29, 30) Were there rules about new ones or children participating? (Galatians 6:1) The elders probably watched over it and made sure it was held in a respectful manner, but since step 3 could be initiated by anyone (Mt 18:15-17, Jas 5:19, 20) it was not up to the elders to decide whether an issue was allowed to be brought before the congregation or not. Other than that we just don't know how step 3 was implemented. Perhaps the basic statement "*to the congregation,*" and the lack of any other stated rules, answers those questions. (Matthew 18:17)

In the end, step 3 made it so that individuals could not get away with false accusations, and corrupt leaders could not get away with it either since they were not secretly judging behind closed doors, but the whole congregation was involved in hearing-out the matter and in making a judgment. So a biased set of two or three could not get away with condemning an innocent one, ejecting a repentant one from the congregation, or even allowing an unrepentant wicked one to remain in the congregation.

Christ himself was falsely accused, judged, and sentenced to death by such religious leaders. He always knew what was going to happen to him (Joh 18:4), and he didn't want Christianity to be like the Jewish system where the religious leaders judged and sentenced those in their flock. He knew the hearts of men (Joh 2:25), and being an eye witness to human history Christ knew that power tended to corrupt, however insignificant the position of power was. So he initiated a new way of doing things for Christianity so that what happened to him could not happen to his followers. (Mt 16:21; Lu 9:22) The Jewish way was susceptible to abuse. Even good men who had the best of intentions were imperfect and made errors in judgment. But Christ's new way eliminated such things. (1Pe 5:3; Lu 22:26; 1Jo 5:16, 17)

Forgive

There are many scriptures that say to forgive, but the original Greek word (aphiémi) translated as "forgive" may not have the same meaning that you would associate with it today. The original Greek word is defined by such terms as: to send away, leave alone, release, permit, pardon. The original Greek term for "forgive" is more akin to releasing someone from an obligation or a debt. So although the scriptures told them that they must forgive a sinner who was repentant, forgiving someone did not mean that they must then immediately put full trust in them again. No doubt the whole congregation kept an eye on such individuals to make sure that they didn't fall back into sinful ways, both for the sake of the individual and for the sake of the congregation.

What determined whether a sinner was removed from the congregation was not the severity of their wrong doing, but the individual's lack of repentance. If they were repentant then the congregation would not have cast the person out. In cases of gross wrongdoing they were probably removed from positions of responsibility or authority for a time, if they had any, but i could not find any scriptures to corroborate that. Regardless, if they repented, they would have been forgiven. (Lu 17:4; 2Co 2:6, 7)

So following Jesus' instructions at Matthew 18:15-17...

- prevented the wicked from getting away with their sins, if it were just up to two or three corrupt friends or relatives in charge who made the decisions.
- helped the guilty to see their wayward ways. If it were just up to two or three to judge them they may have just thought that the ones judging were corrupt or biased or merely wrong.
- redeemed the innocent against false accusations. If it would have been up to just two or three to judge them and the ones judging were wrong or biased or corrupt then they would not have received a just hearing.
- prevented the corrupt and power-hungry from lording it over the congregation through private and secret judgments, and merely the fear of being unjustly judged.
- kept good-hearted elders from being forced to try to impartially judge others. It takes a truly extraordinary man to detach himself from his own personal opinion and remain completely unbiased.
- stopped wicked ones from making false accusations since they would be the one condemned by the congregation and not their intended target.

If after being removed from the congregation an individual had a change of heart and wished to rejoin the congregation, they would probably have had to go before the congregation again and ask for forgiveness. Only then would they have been allowed back in.

(Luke 17:4) Even if he sins seven times a day against you and he comes back to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him."

(Ephesians 4:32) But become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate, freely forgiving one another just as God also by Christ freely forgave you.

So that was how Jesus instructed the early Christians to handle sinners. If anyone tried to introduce a different way of doing things to the early congregations they were to be rejected.

(2 John 10) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him.

Today

The elders do not follow Christ's directions today.

The truth is, in most cases, they have no role to play.

(Matthew 18:15) “Moreover, if your brother commits a sin, go and reveal his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

See, no elders mentioned there at all.

(James 5:19, 20) My brothers, if anyone among you is led astray from the truth and another turns him back, ²⁰ know that whoever turns a sinner back from the error of his way will save him from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

No elders there either.

(Acts 3:19) “Repent, therefore, and turn around so as to get your sins blotted out, so that seasons of refreshing may come from Jehovah himself

Repent to who?

(Matthew 6:9-12) “You must pray, then, this way: “Our Father in the heavens, let your name be sanctified. ¹⁰ Let your Kingdom come. Let your will take place, as in heaven, also on earth. ¹¹ Give us today our bread for this day; ¹² and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

We are to repent to our Father, not to elders, as they would like you to believe.

Does this apply only to minor sins, as they teach?

(1 John 1:9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous so as to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Clearly it's not just for minor sins.

The elders should only be involved when someone who is spiritually sick wants their help (James 5:14-16), or because they are part of the congregation. (Mt 18:17) Although elders today seem eager to judge every situation that comes up in the congregation in their secret backroom meetings, when

Jesus was asked to judge a situation he refused, saying:

(Luke 12:14) “Man, who appointed me judge or arbitrator between you two?”

What do *you* think?

:^)

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Uses of the term "Congregation"

"Congregation", first instance (Mt 18:17a) Greek, ***ek·kle·si'a***

This is every other scripture that also uses that same Greek word:

(Acts 7:38) This is the one who came to be among the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Si'nai and with our forefathers, and he received living sacred pronouncements to give us.

(Acts 9:31) Then, indeed, the congregation throughout the whole of Ju·de'a and Gal'i·lee and Sa·mar'i·a entered into a period of peace, being built up; and as it walked in the fear of Jehovah and in the comfort of the holy spirit, it kept on multiplying.

(Acts 11:26) After he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year they assembled with them in the congregation and taught quite a crowd, and it was first in Antioch that the disciples were by divine providence called Christians.

(Acts 15:22) Then the apostles and the elders, together with the whole congregation, decided to send chosen men from among them to Antioch, along with Paul and Bar'na·bas; they sent Judas who was called Bar'sab·bas and Silas, who were leading men among the brothers.

(Acts 19:32) Some were, in fact, crying out one thing and others something else; for the assembly was in confusion and the majority of them did not know the reason why they had come together.

(Acts 19:39) But if you are searching for anything beyond that, it must be decided in a regular assembly.

(1 Corinthians 1:2) to the congregation of God that is in Corinth, to you who have been sanctified in union with Christ Jesus, called to be holy ones, together with all those everywhere who are calling on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours:

(1 Corinthians 4:17) That is why I am sending Timothy to you, because he is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. He will remind you of my methods in connection with Christ Jesus, just as I am teaching everywhere in every congregation.

(1 Corinthians 6:4) If, then, you do have matters of this life to be tried, is it the men looked down on in the congregation whom you assign as judges?

(1 Corinthians 10:32) Keep from becoming causes for stumbling to Jews as well as Greeks and to the congregation of God,

(1 Corinthians 11:18) For first of all, I hear that when you come together in a congregation, divisions exist among you; and to an extent I believe it.

(1 Corinthians 12:28) And God has assigned the respective ones in the congregation: first, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then powerful works; then gifts of healings; helpful services; abilities to direct; different tongues.

(1 Corinthians 14:5) Now I would like for all of you to speak in tongues, but I prefer that you prophesy. Indeed, the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the congregation may be built up.

(1 Corinthians 14:19) Nevertheless, in a congregation I would rather speak five words with my mind, that I might also instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

(1 Corinthians 14:23) So if the whole congregation comes together to one place and they all speak in tongues, but ordinary people or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you have lost your minds?

(1 Corinthians 14:28) But if there is no interpreter, he must keep silent in the congregation and speak to himself and to God.

(1 Corinthians 14:35) If they want to learn something, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the congregation.

(1 Corinthians 16:19) The congregations of Asia send you their greetings. Aq'ui-la and Pris'ca together with the congregation that is in their house greet you heartily in the Lord.

(2 Corinthians 1:1) Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through God's will, and Timothy our brother, to the congregation of God that is in Corinth, including all the holy ones who are in all A·cha'ia:

(Ephesians 1:22) He also subjected all things under his feet and made him head over all things with regard to the congregation,

(Ephesians 3:21) to him be the glory by means of the congregation and by means of Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

(Ephesians 5:24) In fact, as the congregation is in subjection to the Christ, wives should also be to their husbands in everything.

(Philippians 4:15) In fact, you Phi-lip'pi-ans also know that after you first learned the good news, when I departed from Mac-e-do'ni-a, not a congregation shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone;

(Colossians 1:24) I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and I am undergoing the tribulations of the Christ that are yet lacking in my flesh in behalf of his body, which is the congregation.

(Colossians 4:16) And when this letter has been read among you, arrange for it also to be read in the congregation of the La-o-di-ce'ans and for you also to read the one from La-o-di-ce'a.

(1 Thessalonians 1:1) Paul, Sil·va'nus, and Timothy, to the congregation of the Thes-sa-lo'ni-ans in union with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: May you have undeserved kindness and peace.

(2 Thessalonians 1:1) Paul, Sil·va'nus, and Timothy, to the congregation of the Thes-sa-lo'ni-ans in union with God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

(1 Timothy 3:15) but in case I am delayed, so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in God's household, which is the congregation of the living God, a pillar and support of the truth.

(1 Timothy 5:16) If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her assist them so that the congregation is not burdened. Then it can assist those who are truly widows.

(Hebrews 12:23) in general assembly, and the congregation of the firstborn who have been enrolled in the heavens, and God the Judge of all, and the spiritual lives of righteous ones who have been made perfect,

(3 John 9) I wrote something to the congregation, but Di-ot're-phes, who likes to have the first place among them, does not accept anything from us with respect.

"Congregation", second instance (Mt 18:17b) Greek, **ek·kle·si'as**

This is every other scripture that also uses that same Greek word:

(Acts 11:22) The report about them reached the ears of the congregation in Jerusalem, and they sent out Bar'na-bas as far as Antioch.

(Acts 12:1) About that time Herod the king began mistreating some of those of the congregation.

(Acts 12:5) So Peter was being kept in the prison, but the congregation was intensely praying to God for him.

(Acts 15:3) So after being escorted partway by the congregation, these men continued on through both Phoe·ni'cia and Sa·mar'i·a, relating in detail the conversion of people of the nations and bringing great joy to all the brothers.

(Acts 15:4) On arriving in Jerusalem, they were kindly received by the congregation and the apostles and the elders, and they related the many things God had done by means of them.

(Acts 15:41) He went through Syria and Ci-li'cia, strengthening the congregations.

(Acts 20:17) However, from Mi-le'tus he sent word to Eph'e·sus and called for the elders of the congregation.

(Romans 16:1) I am introducing to you Phoe'be, our sister, who is a minister of the congregation that is in Cen'chre·ae,

(Romans 16:23) Ga'ius, host to me and to all the congregation, greets you. E-ras'tus, the city treasurer, greets you, and so does Quar'tus, his brother.

(1 Corinthians 11:22) Do you not have houses for eating and drinking? Or do you despise the congregation of God and make those who have nothing feel ashamed? What can I say to you? Should I commend you? In this I do not commend you.

(1 Corinthians 14:12) So also with you, since you eagerly desire the gifts of the spirit, seek to abound in gifts that will build up the congregation.

(2 Corinthians 11:8) Other congregations I deprived by accepting provisions in order to minister to you.

(2 Corinthians 12:13) For how were you less favored than the rest of the congregations, except that I myself did not become a burden to you? Kindly forgive me for this wrong.

(Ephesians 3:10) This was so that now, through the congregation, there might be made known to the governments and the authorities in the heavenly places the greatly diversified wisdom of God.

(Ephesians 5:23) because a husband is head of his wife just as the Christ is head of the congregation, he being a savior of this body.

(Colossians 1:18) and he is the head of the body, the congregation. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might become the one who is first in all things;

(1 Timothy 3:5) (for if any man does not know how to preside over his own household, how will he care for the congregation of God?),

(Hebrews 2:12) as he says: "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you with song."

(James 5:14) Is there anyone sick among you? Let him call the elders of the congregation to him, and let them pray over him, applying oil to him in the name of Jehovah.

(3 John 6) They have given a witness about your love before the congregation. Please send them on their way in a manner worthy of God.

(3 John 10) That is why if I come, I will call attention to the works he is doing in spreading malicious talk about us. Not being content with this, he refuses to welcome the brothers with respect; and those who want to welcome them, he tries to hinder and to throw out of the congregation.

(Revelation 2:1) "To the angel of the congregation in Eph'e·sus write: These are the things that he says who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:

(Revelation 2:8) "And to the angel of the congregation in Smyr'na write: These are the things that he says, 'the First and the Last,' who became dead and came to life again:

(Revelation 2:12) "To the angel of the congregation in Per'ga·mum write: These are the things that he says who has the sharp, long, two-edged sword:

(Revelation 2:18) "To the angel of the congregation in Thy·a·ti'ra write: These are the things that the Son of God says, the one who has eyes like a fiery flame and whose feet are like fine copper:

(Revelation 3:1) "To the angel of the congregation in Sar'dis write: These are the things that he says who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: 'I know your deeds, that you have the name that you are alive, but you are dead.

(Revelation 3:7) "To the angel of the congregation in Philadelphia write: These are the things he says who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens so that no one will shut and shuts so that no one opens:

(Revelation 3:14) "To the angel of the congregation in La·o·di·ce'a write: These are the things that the Amen says, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation by God: